

ENTRY

Indians in Virginia

SUMMARY

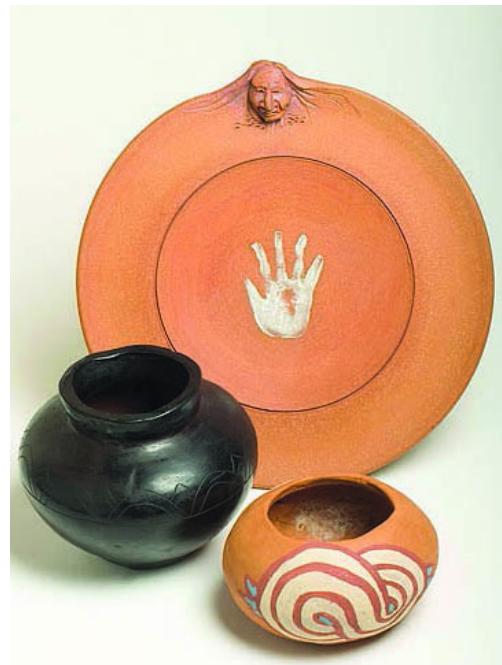
Indians have lived in the area now known as Virginia for thousands of years. Their histories, ancestral connections, and traditions are intertwined with the 6,000 square miles of Tidewater land the Algonquian-speaking Indians of Virginia called **Tsenacomoco**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/tsenacomoco-powhatan-paramount-chiefdom/>]. The early inhabitants of Virginia were hunter-gatherers who followed the migratory patterns of animals. Over time, and as the region warmed, they settled into **towns**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/towns-and-town-life-in-early-virginia-indian-society/>] along riverbanks and outlined their homelands, developing intimate, balanced relationships with the animals, **plants**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/plants-in-early-virginia-indian-society-domesticated/>], and geographic formations. They hunted, **fished**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/fishing-and-shellfishing-by-early-virginia-indians/>], and farmed, and developed complex social and religious systems and vast trade networks. By the early 1600s, Virginia Indians lived in



[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/pamunkey-pottery/>]

Pamunkey Pottery

three broad cultural groups based on the **language**

families found in the area

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/languages-and-interpreters-in-early-virginia-indian-society/>]: Algonquian,

Iroquoian, and Siouan. Scholars know most about the Algonquian-speaking Indians of Tsenacomoco, who eventually grouped together into a paramount chiefdom.

Led by Powhatan

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/powhatan-d-1618/>], the polity ultimately included twenty-eight to thirty-two small chiefdoms and tribes, stretching from the James to the Potomac rivers and encompassing much of Virginia's coastal plain. In 1607, Englishmen arrived and changed Indian life forever. In the midst of a severe drought, the colonists' demands for food and their inability to fully understand Indian cultural practices led in part to three protracted and violent conflicts over four decades, ending in 1646 with the Algonquian-speaking Indians largely subject to English rule. The General Assembly set aside land for the former tribes of Tsenacomoco, although in subsequent years some Indians were forced to move and some groups became dispersed. In the years that followed, they contributed to the developing American culture while working to maintain their own traditions during difficult periods of disease, hunger, forced relocations, and restrictive colonial and later statewide policies that curtailed their rights to travel unmolested through lands now occupied by settlers, to visit their traditional hunting and fishing grounds, and to testify in court on their own behalf. At the beginning of the twentieth

century, a cultural renaissance bloomed and some scholars began to study Indian history more closely. At the same time, the General Assembly did much to deny Indian identity, including passing in 1924 the **Act to Preserve**

Racial Integrity

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/racial-integrity-laws-1924-1930/>], which criminalized interracial marriage and separated Virginians into two simplified racial categories: white and colored. These wrongs were addressed in part by the Supreme Court's decision in

Loving v. Virginia

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/loving-v-virginia-1967/>] (1967) and by state legislation in the late 1980s that allowed Virginia Indians to change the racial designation on their birth certificates without cost. Virginia Indians in the twenty-first century actively cultivate their own culture while educating others about their history.

Contributor: Brendan Wolfe

Indians in Virginia

Sources

Scholars understand Virginia Indians of the colonial

1186

A
DECLARATION
O F
THE STATE OF THE
Colony and Affaires in *VIRGINIA*.

W I T H
A RELATION OF THE BARBA-
rous Massacre in the time of peace and League,
treacherously executed by the Native Infidels
vpon the English, the 22 of March last.

Together with the names of those that were then massacred;
that their lawfull heires, by this notice giuen, may take order
for the inheriting of their lands and estates in
VIRGINIA.

A N D
A TREATISE ANNEXED,

Written by that learned Mathematician Mr. Henry
Briggs, of the Northwest passage to the South Sea
through the Continent of *Virginia*, and
by *Fretum Hudson*.

Also a Commemoration of such worthy Benefactors as haue con-
tributed their Christian Charitie towards the advancement of the Colony.

*And a Note of the charges of necessary prouisions fit for every man that
intends to goe to V I R G I N I A.*

Published by Authoritie.

Imprinted at London by G. Eld, for Robert Mylbourne, and are to be
sold at his shop, at the great South doore of Pauls. 1622.

Title Page of A Declaration of the State of the Colony and
[[Affaires in Virginia](https://encyclopediavirginia.org/8335_313dearoe82879a/)/]

(38)

*At Berkley-Hundred some five miles from
Charles-Cittie.*

C apt. George Thorpe Esq. one of his Ma- iesties Pensioners. John Rowles. Richard Rowles, his Wife, and Childe.	Giles Wilkins. Giles Bradway. Richard Fereby. Thomas Thorpe. Robert Iordan. Edward Painter.
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At Westouer, about a mile from Berkley-Hundred:

And first, at Cap. Fr: Wests Plantation.

James English.
Richard Dash.

At Master John Wests Plantation.

Christopher Turner.
Dauid Owen.

At Capt. Nathanael Wests.

Michael Aleworth.
John Wright.

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/colonial-virginia/>] and precolonial era with

the help of three main types of sources: historical, archaeological, and oral. Historical, or written, sources are the most commonly available. They include laws, official documents, narratives, letters, and even paintings and engravings, all created by Europeans who interacted with Indians. (The Indians did not have a system of writing.) Although these primary sources often provide immediate, eyewitness accounts of events, they are also marked by the biases of Europeans who often failed to fully understand the Indians on their own terms. ***A Declaration of the state of the Colonie and***

Affaires in Virginia [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/a-declaration-of-the-state-of-the-colony-and-affaires-in-virginia-1622/>], for example, was written in 1622 and provides ample detail about the Indian attack of that year. But it also **characterizes** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/an-excerpt-from-a-declaration-of-the-state-of-the-colonie-and-affaires-in-virginia-1622/>] Indians as “beasts,” “without remorse or pitty,” a “Viperous brood” of “hell-hounds” and “wicked Infidels” who “despised Gods great mercies.” Such a source is not helpful for understanding the motives behind the attack or the cultural norms that guided Indian behavior.

To fill out their picture of Virginia Indians from this period, scholars also rely on archaeology and oral history. Archaeologists uncover and study what remains from previous human settlements. For instance, at **Paint Lick Mountain** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/paint-lick-mountain-pictograph-archaeological-site/>] in Tazewell County, archaeologists discovered twenty pictographs on a rock cliff that are symbolic representations related to the way Virginia Indians perceived the world around them. Recovered **ceramics** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/ceramics-virginia-indian/>], meanwhile, demonstrate daily life through objects and help archaeologists draw distinctions between tribes based on the patterns imprinted into them. At the **Jefferson's Mound Archaeological Site** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/jeffersons-mound-archaeological-site/>] in

Albemarle County, Thomas Jefferson

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/jefferson-thomas-1743-1826/>] excavated what is likely a **Monacan Indian** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/monacan-indian-nation/>] burial site, helping to inform scholars on religious practices of the Monacans and those who preceded them.

Oral history includes all the stories, rituals, and basic understandings that are passed down from generation to generation and offers the Indian point of view. Scholars disagree over whether the oral history of Virginia Indians has survived intact from the early seventeenth century. This oral history often diverges significantly from the written, English historical record. In addition to some stories, crafts, such as Pamunkey and Mattaponi pottery and Monacan basketmaking, have survived and provide invaluable insight into Indian culture.

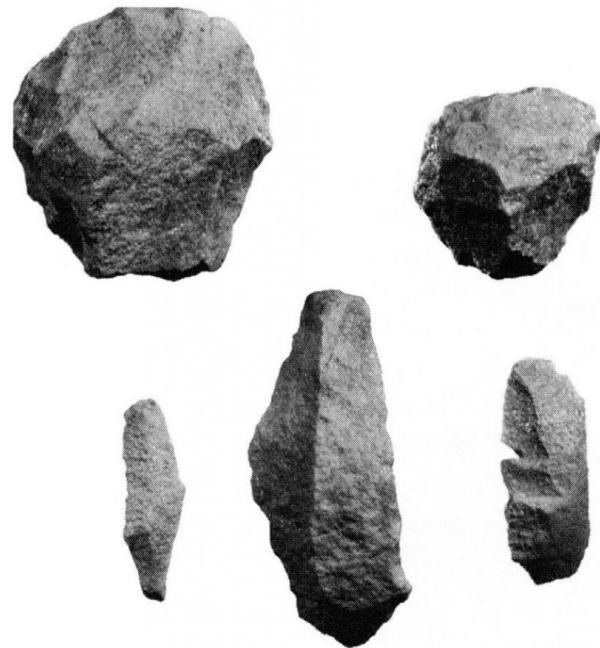


Monacan Baskets

Early History

For decades, scholars asserted that Virginia Indians likely can trace their heritage back to a nomadic people living in Siberia more than 13,000 years ago. Taking advantage of a warming glacier, they crossed over into what is now North America, either by foot or in boats, and spread out across the continent. They left behind what scientists refer to as Clovis-age artifacts, so named for the stone tools and projectile points found near Clovis, New Mexico, in the mid-1930s.

These nomads may not have been the first Virginians, however. Evidence at archaeological sites such as **Cactus Hill**



Pre-Clovis Cores and Blade Flakes

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/cactus-hill-archaeological-site/>], in Sussex County, suggests that a pre-Clovis culture existed there 18,000 to 20,000 years ago. Other sites with significant evidence of a pre-Clovis culture exist in locations as diverse as Pennsylvania and Chile. Proposed explanations of human settlement in America

include arrival by way of a so-called kelp highway from Japan to the western coasts of North and South America, via a corridor between Antarctica to Chile, and even from Western Europe. Scholars continue to debate what relationship these early inhabitants had to today's Virginia Indians, who believe them to be their ancestors.

During the **Paleoindian Period**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/paleoindian-period-16000-8000-bc/>] (16,000–8000 BC), Virginia Indians hunted and gathered in the vast forests that dominated the landscape. They moved from place to place, probably on a seasonal basis, and had no **domesticated animals**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/domesticated-animals-by-early-virginia-indians-uses-of/>] except for the dog. Beginning in the **Early Archaic Period**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/early-archaic-period/>] (8000–6500 BC) and continuing into later periods, gradual climatic changes occurred, resulting in the modern environment several thousand years later. By the **Late Woodland Period**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/late-woodland-period-ad-900-1650/>] (AD 900–1650) scattered populations of Virginia Indians had consolidated into towns, where they adopted a new kind of life around seasonal hunting and gathering and, more importantly, farming.

Languages

Virginia Indians spoke dialects of Algic, Iroquoian, or Siouan, three large language

families that include many of the more than 800 indigenous languages that once existed in North America. It is unknown when speakers of Algonquian, a form of Algic, moved into the Tidewater region of Virginia, but by AD 1607 there existed a complex paramount chiefdom in the region called Tsenacomoco. It consisted of twenty-eight to thirty-two small chiefdoms and tribes. Several groups whose relationship to Tsenacomoco was less clear, such as the **Chickahominy** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/chickahominy-tribe/>], Accomac, and **Patawomeck Indians** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/patawomeck-tribe/>], also spoke Algonquian dialects.

Little is known of the Algonquian dialect spoken by Indians in Virginia and North Carolina. **Thomas Hariot**



Negotiating Peace with the Indians

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/hariot-thomas-ca-1560-1621/>], who visited **Roanoke** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/roanoke-colonies-the/>] in 1585, created a word list that was later lost. In 1612 **John Smith** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries smith-john-bap-1580-1631/>] also **created a**

[list](https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/the-maner-of-their-language-an-excerpt-from-map-of-virginia-with-a-description-of-the-countrey-the-commodities-people-government-and-religion-by-john-smith-1612/) [https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/the-maner-of-their-language-an-excerpt-from-map-of-virginia-with-a-description-of-the-countrey-the-commodities-people-government-and-religion-by-john-smith-1612/] that included now-familiar words such as *mockasin* and *tomahack*. That same year, **William Strachey** [https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/strachey-william-1572-1621/] compiled an even more detailed “**A Dictionarie of the Indian Language.**” [https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/a-dictionarie-of-the-indian-language-an-excerpt-from-the-historie-of-travaile-into-virginia-britannia-by-william-strachey-1612-pub-1849/] Scholars suggest that Smith may have been recording a greatly simplified form of the language; much of Strachey’s list, meanwhile, was gibberish. In 2005, the linguist Blair A. Rudes reconstructed a close approximation of the Virginia Algonquian dialect for the film *The New World*.

The Nottoway and Meherrin Indians lived along the fall line of the rivers of those names in the southwestern Tidewater and far southeastern Piedmont. Both groups spoke a form of Iroquoian. While the Meherrin language was never recorded, in 1820 a professor at the College of William and Mary named John Wood visited the Nottoway community in Southampton County and compiled a word list that, through **correspondence** [https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/letter-from-peter-s-duponceau-to-thomas-jefferson-july-12-1820/] between Thomas Jefferson and a French linguist, was identified as Iroquoian. Virginia’s Siouan-speakers lived west of the fall line and spoke dialects of the Tutelo language. The anthropologist Horatio Hale documented

the Tutelo language in the 1880s by working with Tutelo people who had left Virginia to join the Iroquois and eventually settled in Brantford, Ontario. Virginia Indians in the twenty-first century speak English; no native speakers of the indigenous Virginia languages remain in Virginia.

Tsenacomoco

By the early 1600s, Virginia Indians consisted of three broad cultural groups based on the languages they spoke. The Iroquoians lived along the fall line south of present-day Richmond and in far southeastern and southwestern Virginia; the Siouans lived west of the fall line in the Piedmont, loosely organized into the Monacan confederation; and the



Regulorum aut Principum in Virginia typus (An example of the Rulers or Chiefs in Virginia)

Algonquians lived in the Tidewater. The tribes' cultural practices were similar to those of other eastern Woodlands cultures in many ways: homes were constructed similarly; agricultural practices, warfare and celebrations were conducted similarly; while arts and religious observances varied. Scholars know the most by far about the Algonquians—their political systems, their religion and worldview, their individual leaders, their cultural traditions—because these Indians interacted with the English at **Jamestown**.

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/jamestown-settlement-early/>]. Much of what

is known about the Siouans and Iroquoians of this period comes from the writings of these Englishmen, who often obtained their information from the Algonquians. In other words, the English largely learned about the Monacan Indians, for instance, from tales told by the Monacans' traditional enemies.

The development of centralized governance through chiefdoms, such as the Algonquian paramount chiefdom of Tsenacomoco, goes back to the advent of farming. Farming allowed Indians to provide food for themselves more easily. As their populations increased, so did their need for good farmland. In this regard, the weather created a problem.

The Little Ice Age



Oppidum Secota (The Town of Secota)

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/little-ice-age-and-colonial-virginia-the/>], which lasted from about 1300 to 1750, slightly cooled temperatures and shortened growing seasons, especially in areas to the north of Virginia. Tribes in present-day New York and Pennsylvania pushed south, looking for better land and fighting to claim it. In

part to defend themselves against intruders, the Indians in Tidewater Virginia grouped together into chiefdoms. Among the Algonquians, these usually consisted of one or more towns and were ruled by a *weroance* or *weroansqua* (chief), his or her council, and a group of religious advisors, or priests. Of equal if not greater importance were increasing hostilities and competition within coastal Virginia as the population there grew. Regardless of the source of such threats, small chiefdoms with centralized and inherited positions of leadership were at an advantage over the more decentralized tribes that preceded chiefdoms in the region.

Six small chiefdoms and tribes (one account suggests there were nine) eventually formed what scholars call a paramount chiefdom. In the mid- to late 1500s, Powhatan inherited Tsenacomoco and became paramount chief. Over the next few decades, through a combination of diplomacy and violence, he expanded Tsenacomoco to include twenty-eight to thirty-two districts.

The original six chiefdoms and tribes included the following:

- Powhatan

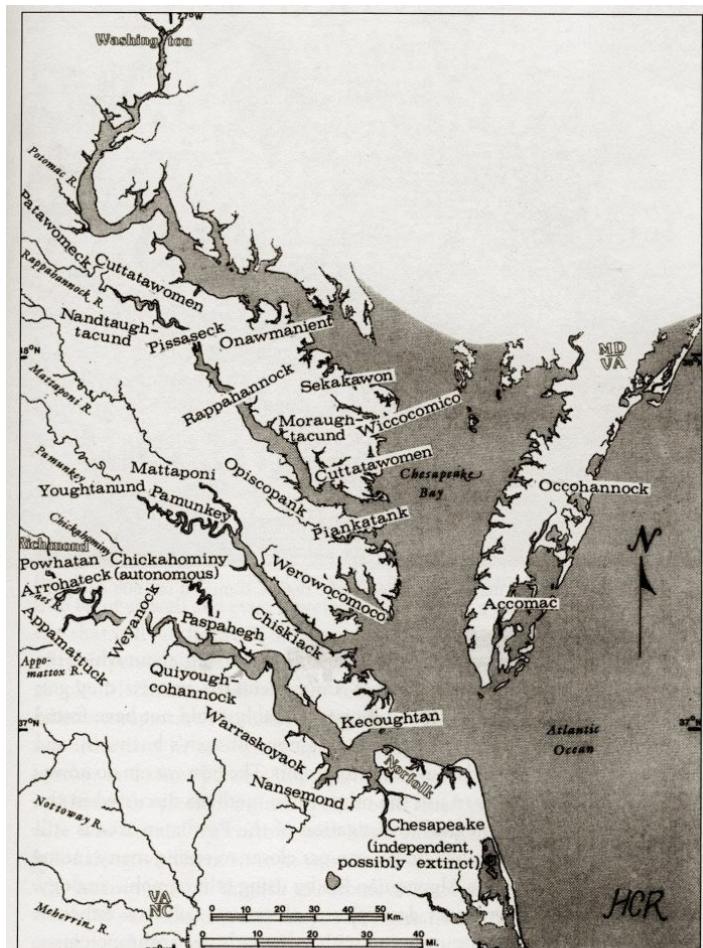


Fig. 3.1. Map of the Powhatan paramount chiefdom in 1607. Courtesy of Helen C. Rountree.

Map of Powhatan Paramount Chiefdom

- Youghtanund



- **Mattaponi** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/mattaponi-tribe/>]
- **Pamunkey** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/pamunkey-tribe/>]
- Arrohateck
- Appamattuck

Additional chiefdoms and tribes included the following:

- Chesapeake
- **Nansemond** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/nansemond-tribe/>]
- Kecoughtan
- Warraskoyack
- Quiyoughcohannock
- Paspahegh
- Weyanock
- Chiskiack
- Werowocomoco
- Piankatank
- Opiscopank
- Lower Cuttatawomen
- Moraughtacund
- **Rappahannock** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/rappahannock-tribe/>]

- Pissaseck
- Nandtaughtacund
- Upper Cuttatawomen
- Wiccocomico
- Sekakawon
- Onawmanient
- Patawomeck
- Accomac
- Occohannock

The Chickahominy Indians, who lived in the heart of Tsenacomoco, on the Chickahominy River, were independent of Powhatan's rule. Others, such as the Patawomeck and Accomac, lived on the chiefdom's outskirts, sometimes paying Powhatan tribute and at other times defying his authority.

Powhatan's control stretched from the south bank of the James River—called the Powhatan River by the Indians—north to the south bank of the Potomac River. Tsenacomoco was bounded on the west by the fall line, and on the east by the Atlantic



The Chickahominy Become “New Englishmen”

Ocean. These geographical boundaries were co-opted by the English and became the unofficial borders of the Virginia colony. By the early 1600s, before the first Englishmen arrived, Tsenacomoco's population ranged from 13,000 to 22,000, and some scholars argue that the name means "densely inhabited place."

The people of Tsenacomoco lived in towns situated along the region's wide, tidal rivers, which made for good farming, good fishing, easy travel, and more efficient communication. Their *yi-hakan*, or **houses**



Incolarum Virginiae piscandi ratio
(The Method of Fishing of the
Inhabitants of Virginia)

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/houses-in-early-virginia-indian-society/>], were constructed of slender wooden poles and woven mats. These dwellings generally had circular or oval floor plans, and a fire burned in the middle of the room. (More important buildings, such as temples and structures associated with chiefs, were larger,

especially in length.) Women nurtured **wild plants** [https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/diet-in-early-virginia-indian-society/] and gathered firewood in the forests, tended fields of corn, squash, and beans, and **cooked** [https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/cooking-in-early-virginia-indian-society/]. Men hunted and fished. They also went to war, which was frequent but usually small-scale.

Unlike most European towns, Indian towns were semipermanent. During the summer, Indians lived in several places at once. They stayed briefly in their towns to weed their crops before traveling to various camps to fish, hunt, and gather plants, nuts, and seeds. And when the soil became worn out by decades of farming, the town's residents gathered their belongings and moved to more fertile land.

Religion

For Virginia Indians inside and outside of Tsenacomoco, **religion** [https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/religion-in-early-virginia-indian-society/] affected all aspects of society. It conferred authority on leaders, explained past occurrences, and pointed to future actions. It not only described the world's origins but also established a comprehensive set of rules governing how people behaved. And it was driven by the need to pay proper respect to spirits who occupied the world alongside human beings. These spirits, according to the historian Bernard Bailyn, were "active, sentient, and sensitive." Although they could not be seen, they were like humans in

many other ways. They had consciences and memories. They had purposes. They could

be made happy or angry. They were everywhere, and they expected reciprocity.

Good weather, good harvests, good health, successful hunts, successful trade, fertility, and peace all could be attributed to correct behavior and happy spirits. If the spirits were not properly respected, the result might be drought, illness, hunger, or war. The rituals of daily life were all important. The people honored spirits but also plants and animals, which the Indians believed to be no less sentient than humans. In addition, menstruating women, prisoners of war, and the dead were all carefully regulated.

Respect given equaled respect received. Maintaining this balance proved a critical function of life for Virginia's Indians, and when misfortune arrived they consulted religious advisors, examined their own dreams, and performed special rituals to help them understand how the imbalance had occurred and how to right it.

Kwiocosuk (religious advisors) mostly lived apart from the community in temples



An Ossuary Temple

and occupied the highest level of Indian society. Their main responsibility was to divine the will of spirits, and chiefs—even Powhatan, who was considered both a political and spiritual leader—required their approval when making most important decisions. Chiefs based their decisions on an understanding of what the spirits required, and they relied on the *kwiocosuk* to make this clear. The religious leaders also acted as doctors.

Interpreting Cultural Norms

In Tsenacomoco, the Englishmen at Jamestown observed a society radically different from theirs and struggled to understand it. They associated the numerous Indian spirits with **the Christian devil**



Praestigiator



English Interacting with Powhatan

grasp the importance of balance and respect in **gift-giving practices**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/gift-exchange-in-early-virginia-indian-society/>] and trade. Unlike the Europeans', the Indians' **personal names** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/personal-names-by-early-virginia-indians-uses-of/>] could change depending on circumstances. Wahunsonacock became Powhatan upon assuming the position of paramount chief; his successor Opitchapam became Otiotan. Names changed because of deeds accomplished or about to be accomplished.

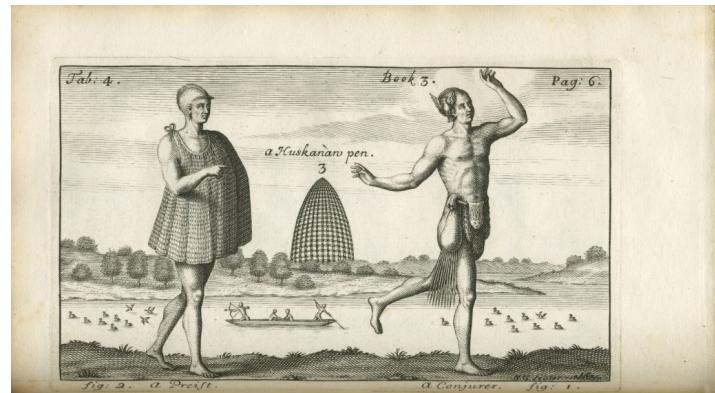
Just before Otiotan and **Opechancanough**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/opechancanough-d-1646/>] attacked the English in 1622, they changed their names to Sasawpen and Mangopeesomon, respectively. Had the English better understood this cultural norm, they might have seen that particular name-changing ceremony as a precursor to war.

The Indians practiced better hygiene than did the English, bathing daily in all seasons and all weather. In formal interactions, the Indians appeared to be stoic and imperturbable. A speaker was never **interrupted**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/manners-and-politeness-in-early-virginia-indian-society/>] and refrained from speaking until the appropriate moment. In instances of minor personal conflict, they chose either to withdraw from the situation or to bear any imposition without complaint. Aggression was saved for **game-playing** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/games-by-early-virginia-indians-uses-of/>] and warfare.

The community taught boys to hunt and wage war and girls how to collect plants, build houses and furnishings, and farm. The ***huskanaw***



Huskanaw Cage

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/huskanaw/>], a coming-of-age ceremony for boys, involved what the **English interpreted** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/the-huskanaw-ritual-an-excerpt-from-the-history-of-virginia-by-robert-beverley-1722/>] as a ritual killing but which represented a transition during which the boy symbolically died in order to become a man. None of the young men were purposefully killed during the ritual, but they were given a drug that may have made them briefly violent. Men could **take as many wives**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/marriage-in-early-virginia-indian-society/>] as they could provide for; Powhatan may have had as many as 100 during his lifetime.

While the first marriage was expected to last for life, the others were generally shorter.

Divorce [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/divorce-in-early-virginia-indian-society/>] was permitted, though uncommon, and wives could, with their husbands' agreement, conduct extramarital affairs.

Virginia Indians' social systems were governed by laws that were orally codified

through sacred stories, songs, and poems. They often were very sensitive to breaches of conduct and exacted revenge against either an individual or a group in order to restore balanced relations. In such cases, chiefs were not inclined to intervene. This led to frequent hostilities, sometimes against people whom the English might have understood to be innocent but whom the Indians did not. Indians perceived imbalance and angry spirits; individual responsibility was less important than the imperative of righting that imbalance and placating the spirits. As a result, some Englishmen viewed the Indians as **irrational and lawless** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/justice-and-execution-an-excerpt-from-relation-of-virginia-1609-by-henry-spelman-1613/>]. In contrast, the Indians saw the English as uncivilized.

European Arrival

The Indians were familiar with Europeans well before the **first Englishmen** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/paquiquineo-s-story-2/>] landed at Jamestown in 1607. The Spanish may have set foot in present-day Virginia by the 1530s and regularly explored the coastline. In 1561, they picked up a Virginia Indian named **Paquiquineo** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/don-luis-de-velasco-paquiquineo-fl-1561-1571/>] and nine years later he returned to the

Chesapeake area with a group of Jesuits, only to **kill the missionaries**

[<https://encycopediavirginia.org/entries/relation-of-juan-de-la-carrera-march-1-1600/>] a few months later. In 1584, Englishmen financed by **Sir Walter Raleigh** [<https://encycopediavirginia.org/entries/raleigh-sir-walter-ca-1552-1618/>] picked up two more Algonquian-speaking Indians, Manteo and Wanchese, from the coast of present-day North Carolina and took them to England. These two Indians played crucial roles in the **various tragedies** [<https://encycopediavirginia.org/entries/ralph-lane-on-the-killing-of-pemisapan-an-excerpt-from-an-account-of-the-particularities-of-the-employments-of-the-english-men-left-in-virginia-1589/>] that marked the two subsequent attempts at establishing a colony at Roanoke.

When the English built a fort at Jamestown, Powhatan knew to be cautious. He allowed his people both to **entertain**

[<https://encycopediavirginia.org/entries/arriving-in-virginia-an-excerpt-from-observations-gathered-out-of-a-discourse-of-the-plantation-of-the-southerne-colonie-in-virginia-by-george-percy-1625/>] and attack the intruders, likely in an attempt to better grasp their strength and their intentions. (The Arrohateck chief **Ashuaquid** [<https://encycopediavirginia.org/entries/ashuaquid-fl-1607/>] was particularly generous.) Misunderstandings abounded. After his men had captured Captain John Smith, Powhatan attempted to make the Englishman a *weroance* answering only to the paramount chief. Smith may have misunderstood the ritual as an attempt on his life and Powhatan's daughter, Pocahontas, as his savior; almost all modern scholars dispute

Smith's interpretation of the event. Later, Smith and Captain **Christopher Newport**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/newport-christopher-1561-after-august-15-1617/>] similarly attempted to bring Powhatan under their control by crowning him an emperor answering only to **King James**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/james-vi-and-i-1566-1625/>]. Powhatan firmly rejected the offer, refusing to stoop so that the crown could be placed on his head.

Drought and **extreme weather** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/letter-from-francis-perkins-in-jamestown-to-a-friend-in-england-march-28-1608/>] complicated these relations. Food was scarce, and at times Powhatan feasted the Englishmen in a show of hospitality. At other times, the colonists traded for or forcibly took grain, violating Indian gift-exchange norms in the process and provoking violence.

Anglo-Powhatan Wars

By 1609, Powhatan was determined to resist the English, who grabbed Indian food and land with no reciprocal offerings. **Violence flared**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/the-first-anglo-powhatan-war-begins-an-excerpt-from-a-trewe-relacyon-of-the-procedeings-and-ocurrentes-of-momente-which-have-hapned-in-virginia-by-george-percy/>] during the summer in the wake of English aggression, and Powhatan responded by cutting off all food from James Fort during the winter. Many of the settlers **starved** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/starving-time-the/>]. What followed was the long but only intermittently violent **First Anglo-**

Powhatan War [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/first-anglo-powhatan-war->

1609-1614/] (1609–1614), which ended after the Patawomeck Indians helped the English capture Pocahontas. She was imprisoned as a hostage at Henricus. Her subsequent conversion to Christianity and **marriage** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/letter-from-john-rolfe-to-sir-thomas-dale-1614/>] to **John Rolfe** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/rolfe-john-d-1622/>] created peaceful relations between the English and Indians that lasted several years beyond her death. This led some of the English to believe that the Indians had capitulated to English rule.

On March 22, 1622, a few years after the death of Powhatan, the Pamunkey leader Opechancanough led a **massive attack** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/anglo-powhatan-war-second-1622-1632/>] on the English settlements along the James River. Known by the Indians as the Great Attack and by the English as the Great Massacre, the assault killed as many as a quarter to a third of the Virginia colony's English inhabitants and launched a ten-year war that ended in yet another uneasy truce. (**Chauco**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/chauco-fl-1622-1623/>] may have been one of several Indians who warned the English at Jamestown of the attack.)

Opechancanough attacked again in 1644, and after his capture and death in 1646, a more lasting, if not particularly generous, **treaty** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/treaty-ending-the-third-anglo-powhatan-war->

1646/] was finally signed. Along with the **Articles of Peace** [https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/articles-of-peace-1677/], drawn up and signed under the authority of the Pamunkey chief **Cockacoeske** [https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/cockacoeske-d-by-july-1-1686/] after **Bacon's Rebellion** [https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/bacons-rebellion-1676-1677/] in 1677, the treaty placed the Virginia Algonquians entirely under the protection and control of the English colonial government. A number of additional *weroances* of tribes that were not under Cockacoeske's authority eventually signed those treaties as well, as did some Siouan and Iroquoian tribes, including the Nottoway and the Monacan.

The Decline of Tsenacomoco

The 1646 treaty set aside land for, among others, the Pamunkey, Mattaponi, Nottoway, Chickahominy, Nansemond, and Accomac (Gingaskin) Indians and established a tradition of paying yearly tribute to the Virginia governor—a tradition that the Pamunkey and Mattaponi tribes have continued into the twenty-first century. (The fourth



presentations of fish and game at either the State Capitol or Executive Mansion in Richmond.) When Cockacoeske signed the treaty of 1677 she represented a number of Powhatan-affiliated tribes—a last and brief resurgence of Tsenacomoco. Traditionally independent, the Chickahominy and Rappahannock Indians refused to submit to her authority. Cockacoeske's successor was also a woman, whose name in colonial documents was **Ann** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/ann-fl-1706-1712/>].

The **governor's Council** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/governors-council-the/>] appropriated land for the Rappahannock Indians in 1682, but they were forced out a year later, settling in Portobago Indian Town in present-day Essex County. After being made to move again in 1706, they returned to their ancestral land in King and Queen County. In the meantime, attacks by Iroquoian-speaking Indians led many of the surviving Mattaponi Indians to disperse in 1683. Some joined the Pamunkey and Chickahominy Indians in King William County. In 1718, the government forced the Chickahominy to relocate, and by 1820 the tribe had begun to settle in its present-day location in Charles City County.

A group of Nansemond Indians converted to Christianity and, starting with the Nansemond woman Elizabeth and the Englishman John Bass in 1638, began to intermarry with the descendants of Nathaniel Bass (perhaps **Basse** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/basse-nathaniel-bap-1589-1654/>]). After the turn of the eighteenth century, a group of the Christian Nansemond moved to Norfolk

County, near the Great Dismal Swamp; the current members of the Nansemond tribe are

largely descended from this group. The Nansemond who did not convert to Christianity remained on a reservation, which they sold to the Virginia government in 1792. By that time, only three reservation Nansemond remained alive; the last died in 1806.

The Patawomeck Indians who lived in present-day Westmoreland County fought the encroachment of English planters, some of whom even attempted to **frame a chief for murder**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/the-case-of-wahanganoche-an-excerpt-from-the-journals-of-the-house-of-burgesses-of-virginia-1662/>] in 1662. After the planters raised a militia against the Patawomeck in 1663, the General Assembly, in 1665, reserved to the governor [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/an-act-concerning-indians-october-1665/>] the power to appoint all tribal chiefs and required [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/an-act-concerning-the-building-of-a-fort-october-1665/>] that the Patawomeck sell all of their remaining land for the site of a fort. In 1666, the governor's Council declared war on the Patawomeck, calling for "their utter



Nansemond Family

destruction if possible and that their women and children and their goods ... shall be

taken to be disposed of." A 1669 census recorded no Patawomeck warriors, and the tribe disappeared from all colonial records. Their descendants currently live in Stafford County and the area surrounding Fredericksburg.

Assimilation, Marginalization, and Renaissance

From the colonial period until the twentieth century, Virginia Indians faced enormous pressure to assimilate to English and American culture in various ways. They learned to speak English, wore Western-style clothing, ate and cooked Western-style food, and built Western-style homes. Some Indians were **enslaved**



Councilor James Johnson

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/indian-enslavement-in-virginia/>], both at plantations in the Caribbean, where the English transported members of hostile tribes,

and in the American South, where they labored alongside Africans and African Americans. Virginia's Indians, meanwhile, continued to largely live apart from the rest of Virginia society. Some, including members of the Pamunkey tribe, **served the Union** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/unionism-in-virginia-during-the-civil-war/>] as spies, land guides, and river pilots during the **American Civil War** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/civil-war-in-virginia-the-american/>] (1861–1865). The College of William and Mary was committed to educating Indian children even before constructing the Brufferton building for that purpose in 1723. The Indian School housed at the Brufferton faltered, however, and closed in 1779. A century later, in 1878, the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, originally established for African Americans, accepted its first Indian students. They came not from Virginia but from the western United States and New York.

Then, in the first twenty-five years of the twentieth century, a cultural renaissance began to take shape. Men like James Johnson, a Rappahannock tribal official who might once have worn a suit and tie was, in 1925, photographed wearing a Western-style headdress and buckskin. The change was noticed by—some have argued even precipitated by—the anthropologist Frank G. Speck. Referring to this photograph of Johnson he observed, “In respect to their consciousness the Rappahannock may be said to possess the same tenacity of feeling and purpose as regards their tribal identity as the kindred Powhatan bands.”

At the same time, however, the state was beginning to initiate a series of actions that

would seek to diminish, if not entirely destroy, Indian identity. In 1924, the General

Assembly passed the Act to Preserve

Racial Integrity, which, along with

subsequent legislation, banned interracial

marriage in Virginia and required racial

identifications on birth and marriage

certificates. “White” was defined as

having no trace of African ancestry, while

all other people, including Virginia

Indians, were defined as “colored.”

Falsifying racial information on a government form—as the state registrar **Walter**

Plecker [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/plecker-walter-ashby-1861-1947/>]

regularly accused others of doing, as a form of intimidation—was a felony. To

accommodate elite Virginians who claimed Pocahontas and John Rolfe as ancestors, the

law allowed for those who had “one-sixteenth or less of the blood of the American Indian

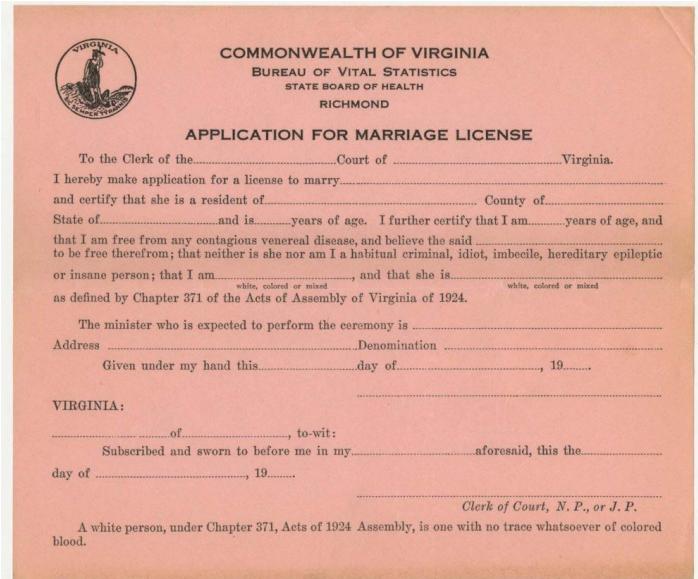
and have no other non-Caucasic blood [to] be deemed to be white persons.” The law was

vigorously opposed by Indians such as the Pamunkey chief **George Major Cook**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/cook-george-major-1860-1930/>] and the

Mattaponi chief **George F. “Thunder Cloud” Custalow**

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/custalow-george-f-thunder-cloud-1865-1949/>], who understood its implications: legally speaking, Virginia Indians had ceased to



Application for Marriage License

exist.

That wasn't true in reality, of course.

By mid-century, Virginia Indian culture was in revival. By 1989, eight tribes—the Mattaponi, Pamunkey, Chickahominy,

Eastern Chickahominy



Monacan Tribal Recognition

[<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/eastern-chickahominy-tribe/>], Rappahannock, **Upper Mattaponi** [<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/upper-mattaponi-tribe/>], Nansemond, and Monacan—had been recognized by the state. In 2010, another three followed suit: the Cheroenhaka Nottoway, the Nottoway of Virginia, and the Patawomeck tribes. And on July 2, 2015, the U.S. Department of the Interior officially granted the Pamunkey tribe federal recognition.

In the twenty-first century, Virginia Indian tribes seek to cultivate their own

cultural identity while educating other Virginians about their history. They do this through tribal cultural centers, annual powwows, and educational outreach. The Virginia Indian Heritage Program at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities also works with and on behalf of the state's tribes. According to its mission statement, the program exists to "help redress centuries of historical omission, exclusion, and misrepresentation."

EXTERNAL LINKS

The Virginia Indian Program at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities [<http://virginiahumanities.org/virginia-indian-program/>] **Virginia Indian Digital Archive** [<http://virginiaindianarchive.org/>]

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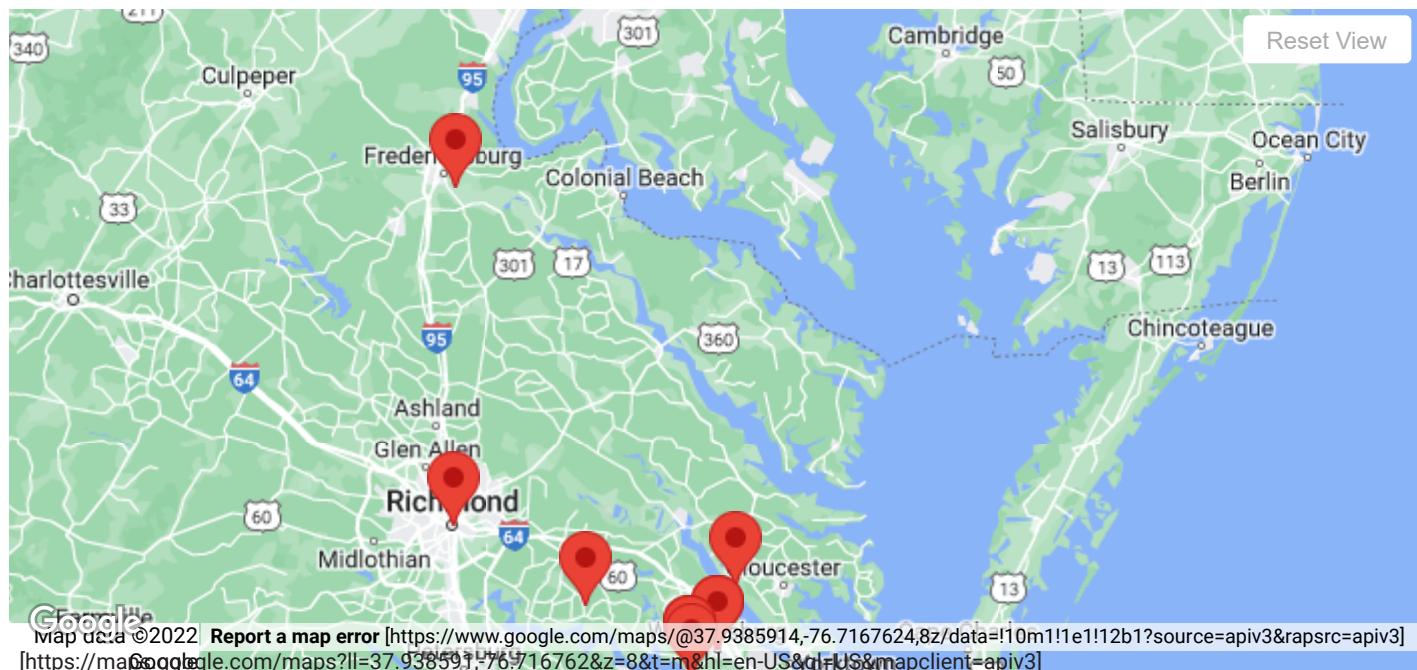
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MAP



TIMELINE

ca. 16,000–18,000 B.C.

Indians are living at Cactus Hill, in present-day Sussex County. Their relation to later Virginia Indians is unclear.

ca. 900

At the beginning of the Late Woodland Period, the foundations are laid for the transition by Virginia Indians to a more sedentary life. They begin to settle in towns and place increasing reliance on domesticated plants.

Late June 1561

Two Virginia Indians—Paquiquineo and his companion—encounter the Spanish caravel *Santa Catalina* somewhere near where the James River empties into the Chesapeake Bay. The two Indians either volunteer to go with the Spanish or are kidnapped.

February 1571

Paquiquineo (once Don Luís), a Virginia Indian who has lived in Spain and Mexico and has recently returned to the Chesapeake Bay as part of a Jesuit mission, leads a group of Paspaheghs in an ambush against the Jesuits. All the missionaries are killed, save a young boy.

1584

Under the tutelage of Manteo and Wanchese, Thomas Hariot begins learning and transcribing the Algonquian language of the Virginia Indians.

Mid-August 1584

The English exploration party led by Philip Amadas and Arthur Barlowe sails for England, taking along two high-ranking Algonquian-speaking Indians, Wanchese and Manteo.

April 9, 1585

Five ships and two smaller pinnaces along with 600 men set sail from Plymouth, England, for Roanoke Island, along the present-day Outer Banks of North Carolina. Sir Richard Grenville commands the flagship *Tiger*, which is piloted by Simon Fernandes. John White, Thomas Hariot, and the Indians Manteo and Wanchese are also present.

August 9, 1587

A party of Roanoke colonists, led by the Indian Manteo, attacks the town of Dasemunkepeuc in the early morning hours. Instead of killing enemy Roanoke Indians, however, they kill friendly Croatoans, including the *weroance* Menatonon.

April 26, 1607

Jamestown colonists first drop anchor in the Chesapeake Bay, and after a brief skirmish with local Indians, begin to explore the James River.

June 25, 1607

By this date, Powhatan, the paramount chief of Tsenacomoco, sends an ambassador to Edward Maria Wingfield, president of the Jamestown colony, promising peaceful relations and inviting the Englishmen to plant gardens.

September 1607

By this month, the Jamestown colonists, who landed in April, have exhausted their stores of food and survive only on gifts of food from Powhatan's subchiefs, including Opechancanough.

December 1607

Late in the month, John Smith is brought before Powhatan, the paramount chief of Tsenacomoco. He later tells of his life being saved by Pocahontas; in fact, Powhatan likely puts Smith through a mock execution in order to adopt him as a *weroance*, or chief.

February 1608

Christopher Newport and John Smith visit Powhatan, the paramount chief of Tsenacomoco, at his capital, Werowocomoco. Powhatan feeds them and their party lavishly, and Newport presents the chief with a suit of clothing, a hat, and a greyhound. The English continue upriver to visit Opechancanough at the latter's request.

June—September 1608

John Smith explores the Chesapeake Bay without Powhatan's permission.

September 1608

Christopher Newport returns from England with a plan to improve relations with Virginia Indians by bestowing on Powhatan various gifts and formally presenting him with a decorated crown. The subsequent crowning is made awkward by Powhatan's refusal to kneel, and relations sour.

Summer 1609

John Smith unsuccessfully attempts to purchase from Powhatan, the paramount chief of Tsenacomoco, the fortified town of Powhatan in order to

settle English colonists there.

October 1609

John Smith leaves Virginia. The Jamestown colony's new leadership is less competent, and the Starving Time follows that winter.

November 1609

Powhatan Indians lay siege to Jamestown, denying colonists access to outside food sources. The Starving Time begins, and by spring 160 colonists, or about 75 percent of Jamestown's population, will be dead from hunger and disease. This action begins the First Anglo-Powhatan War (1609–1614).

April 1613

Powhatan's favorite daughter, Pocahontas, is captured and held hostage by the English, bringing a truce in the First Anglo-Powhatan War. The fight goes out of Powhatan, and during his apathy over the next year, his daughter is converted by the English.

April 1618

The death of Powhatan, paramount chief of Tsenacomoco, is reported to the English colonists.

1618–1621

While the elderly Opitchapam serves as paramount chief of Tsenacomoco, Opechancanough appears to build his own power base without unduly alarming the English.

March 22, 1622

Indians under Opechancanough unleash a series of attacks that start the Second Anglo-Powhatan War. The assault was originally planned for the fall of 1621, to coincide with the redisposition of Powhatan's bones, suggesting that the attack was to be part of the final mortuary celebration for the former chief.

1630

By this year, Opechancanough succeeds Opitchapam as paramount chief of Tsenacomoco.

August 14, 1638

John Bass, who may be the son of Nathaniel Basse and Mary Jordan Basse, marries Elizabeth, a Nansemond woman who has converted to Christianity.

April 18, 1644

Opechancanough and a force of Powhatan Indians launch a second great assault against the English colonists, initiating the Third Anglo-Powhatan War. As many as 400 colonists are killed, but rather than press the attack, the Indians retire.

1646

The English capture Opechancanough on the Pamunkey River. His successor, Necotowance, surrenders to the colonists, and Opechancanough is shot and killed while in English custody at Jamestown.

1662

A group of planters in Westmoreland County attempts to frame the Patawomeck *weroance*, Wahanganoche, for murder. The chief is eventually exonerated.

1663

Gerrard Fowke, a planter in Westmoreland County and a burgess, raises a militia and leads it against the Patawomeck Indians without the General Assembly's consent.

October 1665

In "An act concerning Indians," the General Assembly, among other things, reserves to the governor the right to appoint tribal *weroances*, or chiefs.

October 1665

In "An act concerning the building of a ffort," the General Assembly requires that the Patawomeck sell all of their remaining land for the site of a fort.

1666

The governor's Council declares war on the Patawomeck Indians, calling for "their utter destruction if possible."

1669

A census records no warriors among the Patawomeck Indians. The tribe has disappeared from colonial records.

May 29, 1677

Cockacoeske signs the Treaty of Middle Plantation, and at her request several tribes are reunited under her authority. But having been free of Powhatan domination since 1646, the Chickahominy and Rappahannock stubbornly refuse to become subservient to her or to pay tribute.

November 1682

An order of the governor's Council directs that 3,474 acres of land should be laid out for the Rappahannock Indians "about the town where they dwelt."

1683–1684

The General Assembly forces the Rappahannock Indians to leave their fortified village and move upriver, to Portobago Indian Town.

November 21, 1683

Iroquoian-speaking Indians attack Virginia Indian settlements from Rappahannock to New Kent counties and down the Mattaponi River.

1706

By order of Essex County, the Rappahannock tribe is forced to leave Portobago Indian Town. Tribal members settle downriver, in King and Queen County, the location of their ancestral homelands.

1718

After this year, Virginia Indians are forced to relocate from the Pamunkey Neck area of present-day King William County, where they have lived since the peace

treaty of 1677.

1723

Construction is begun on the Brafferton building to house the Indian school at the College of William and Mary.

1779

The Indian school located in the Brafferton building at the College of William and Mary closes.

1792

The Nansemond tribe sells its last known reservation lands, 300 acres on the Nottoway River in Southampton County.

1820

By this year, families with present-day Chickahominy surnames have begun to settle in Charles City County.

1878

The Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute accepts Native American students, most of whom come not from Virginia but from the western United States and territories.

March 20, 1924

Governor E. Lee Trinkle signs "An act to Preserve Racial Integrity," a law aimed at protecting whiteness on the state level. It prohibits interracial marriage, defines a white person as someone who has no discernible non-white ancestry, and requires that birth and marriage certificates indicate people's races.

March 25, 1983

Virginia Joint Resolution 54 extends official state recognition to the Chickahominy tribe, the Eastern Chickahominy tribe, the United Rappahannock tribe, and the Upper Mattaponi tribe. Although Virginia had recognized the Pamunkey and Mattaponi tribes since colonial times, that past recognition was acknowledged by this resolution.

1984

The Nansemond tribe receives official state recognition.

February 16, 2010

Virginia extends state recognition to the Patawomeck Indian Tribe of Virginia, the Nottoway Indian Tribe of Virginia, and the Cheroenhaka (Nottoway) Indian Tribe.

July 2, 2015

The U.S. Department of the Interior grants official federal recognition to the Pamunkey tribe.

January 29, 2018

The Thomasina E. Jordan Indian Tribes of Virginia Federal Recognition Act is signed into law, granting official federal recognition to the Chickahominy, Eastern Chickahominy, Monacan, Nansemond, Rappahannock, and Upper Mattaponi tribes.

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